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SUBJECT: SERBIAN FM JEREMIC VISIT UNDERSCORES RUSSIA'S POSITION ON KOSOVO

Classified By: M/C for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Serbian FM Jeremic's November 22 visit to Moscow served to reconfirm Russian-Serbian solidarity in the runup to the end of the Kosovo troika talks. Lavrov reiterated Russia's firm support for Serbia, noting that December 10 was not "the end of history." Jeremic noted that Serbia saw breaks in the EU's position on Kosovo, but felt that in the end Germany's strong involvement in the process would bring wavering countries on board. The GOR and Serbia agreed that no decisions should be made on the OSCE mission in Kosovo until after further UNSC discussions. Jeremic asserted that in the event of a Kosovo UDI, Serbia would use all measures except force to express its displeasure, but it was preparing security measures for the possibility of unrest in border regions. Lavrov warned that a UDI would set off a "chain reaction" in the Balkans. Jeremic and Lavrov also discussed Russian investment in Serbian air, energy, and mining sectors, and Lavrov expressed unhappiness at Serbia voting with the EU on a UN resolution involving Georgian refugees. Serbian President Tadic may visit Moscow at the beginning of January. End Summary.

Jeremic and Lavrov Reiterate Positions

¶2. (C) On November 26, MFA Third European Department Counselor Denis Kuznedelev told us that Jeremic's visit to Moscow to meet with FM Lavrov and Presidential Representative to the Central Region Poltavchenko was a Serbian initiative and was welcomed by Russia as a chance to compare visions prior to the December 10 deadline. He told us that Lavrov reiterated the GOR's firm position against setting time limits on negotiations and insisted Russia would only support a decision reached by both Belgrade and Pristina. Lavrov had positively assessed the Serbian government's contribution to the troika process, stating it had shown flexibility in negotiations and only requested retention of "limited and symbolic" competencies in Kosovo. Serbian political counselor Boris Sekulic told us that Jeremic had stressed that Serbia was prepared to allow Kosovo "everything except a place in the UN and its own borders."

¶3. (C) According to Kuznedelev, Jeremic told Lavrov that he was pessimistic about the troika process, but declared that the potential for a negotiated solution was not exhausted and Serbia wanted to continue dialogue in some form. Jeremic saw differences in the EU regarding Kosovo, and thought the bulk of the EU had yet to make up its mind on how to proceed after December 10. Nonetheless, he believed Germany's efforts to play a main part in "solving" Kosovo would cause most other EU countries to adopt Germany's position in the end.

¶4. (C) Jeremic and Lavrov were set to meet again on the margins of the November 29 OSCE ministerial, Kuznedelev said. He told us the GOR and Serbia had a "close understanding"

regarding the future of the OSCE mission in Kosovo, and that they would block any attempt to renew the mission for 2008 before the troika's report was in. The GOR expected further debate on Kosovo's status in the UNSC before it would be willing to agree to any extension of the mission's mandate.

In Case of a UDI

¶ 15. (C) If there were a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) by Kosovo, Kuznedelev told us Jeremic assured Lavrov that Serbia would not use force, but would use every other tool at its disposal to express its displeasure, including political, diplomatic, and economic blockades. Sekulic said that Lavrov confirmed that the GOR would continue to support Serbia, and noted that the GOR took a harder line in support of the Serbian position than the Serbian government had expected. Lavrov said that in the case of a UDI, the GOR would increase its rhetoric in international fora and would be "hard" against the U.S. and EU.

¶ 16. (C) In the event of a UDI, Jeremic said that Kosovar Serbs would not associate with "self-proclaimed independence," according to Kuznedelev. Jeremic said that Belgrade was preparing security measures in Preshevo, Medveda, and Bujanovac in case of unrest in their Albanian populations. He reiterated that a UDI would bring instability to Bosnia, Macedonia, and Southern Serbia, noting that it was difficult for Serbia to uphold Bosnian unity "so strongly as before" if international law was "destroyed" in Kosovo. Sekulic told us that Lavrov said a "chain reaction" would take place in the Balkans after a UDI.

Economic Focus on Russian Investment

MOSCOW 00005580 002 OF 002

¶ 17. (C) Kuznedelev played down the importance of economic discussions, but Sekulic told us that several Russian economic ventures in Serbia were discussed. Jeremic hoped that the Southstream gas pipeline would transit through Serbia, and Sekulic said Lavrov assured him that Russia would confirm its chosen route by the end of December. Sekulic also said Aeroflot's interest in buying JAR, the Serbian national airline, and the main airport in Belgrade, were discussed, as well as Russian mining company SMR's interest in copper mining. Sekulic told us that Gazprom was interested in purchasing Serbian oil company NIS when it was privatized, but Serbia preferred to privatized the company slowly, 25% at a time, whereas Gazprom wanted to by a 51% stake immediately. Sekulic also said that although Lavrov told Jeremic the GOR supported Serbia's goal of joining the EU, the GOR was not happy with Serbia's vote with the EU on a UN resolution on Georgian refugees.

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